

Route Descriptions

This book contains 30 route descriptions ranging from four-day introductory treks to demanding traverses up to 11 days, plus suggestions for other treks, side trips and alternative routes. Each trek description has a brief introduction outlining the natural and cultural features you may encounter, plus information to help you plan your trek – transport options, level of difficulty, time frame and any permits required.

The treks include information on campsites and lodges and places where you can obtain water and supplies.

TIMES & DISTANCES

These are provided only as a guide. Times are based on actual walking time and do not include stops for snacks, taking photographs, rests or side trips. Be sure to factor these in when planning your trek.

In most cases, the daily stages are flexible and can be varied. It is important to recognise that short stages are sometimes recommended in order to acclimatise in mountain areas or because there are interesting features to explore en route.

Distances are provided but should be read in conjunction with altitudes. Anticipate covering up to 5 or 6km on a good undulating trail, around 4km on an average trail down, to 2 to 3km on a high pass crossing.

Significant elevation changes can make a greater difference to your walking time than lateral distance. On average a trekker will ascend around 300m per hour, less at altitudes over 4000m.

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Grading systems are always arbitrary. However, having an indication of the grade may help you choose between treks. Our authors use the following grading guidelines:

Easy – a trek on flat terrain or with minor elevation changes usually over short distances on well-travelled routes with no navigational difficulties.

Moderate – a trek with challenging terrain, often involving longer distances and steep climbs.

Demanding – a trek with long daily distances and difficult terrain with significant elevation changes; may involve challenging route-finding and high-altitude or glacier travel.

TRUE LEFT & TRUE RIGHT

The terms ‘true left’ and ‘true right’, used to describe the bank of a stream or river, sometimes throw readers. The ‘true left bank’ simply means the left bank, as you look downstream.

Planning

The Indian Himalaya offers superb trekking possibilities. It is undoubtedly one of the most spectacular and impressive mountain ranges in the world. Compared to Nepal, the region hosts a small number of trekkers each year, but there is a steady, growing interest. In fact, they're finding a choice of treks that are as demanding and rewarding as those in the Everest or Annapurna regions.

To fully appreciate the beauty of the Indian Himalaya, there is no substitute for trekking. This unforgettable experience brings you in direct contact with the country and its people, and helps to foster an appreciation of the mountain environments.

It is essential that you select a trek suitable to your interests and ability. Taking note of the grading for each trek is imperative to ensure that your trek lives up to expectations.

HISTORY OF TREKKING

While pilgrims, armies and traders had for many centuries explored the Himalaya, organised trekking was closely associated with the pursuit of hunting for game that gained popularity in India in the later part of the 19th century. By the turn of the 20th century it was well under way. It was not uncommon for the British to undertake a trek from Srinagar to Leh as part of their annual leave. Agencies were established in Srinagar and Shimla to specialise in sport-related activities – hunting, fishing and trekking. A large retinue of porters would carry huge canvas tents and collapsible string beds.

In 1933 Ernest Neve revised the 15th edition of *The Tourist's Guide to Kashmir, Ladakh & Skardo* to reflect the increasing interest in travelling to higher and more remote valleys. Arrangements out of Kashmir could be left to Cockburn's Agency or to a houseboat family and, judging by the reports retained by some houseboat families, a trusted guide and a reliable cook were the most valuable assets to any trekking party. Crossing huge distances was no longer deemed to be extraordinary. Consider the case of Robert Fleming, who trekked for seven months from Peking to Kashmir and received not so much as a nod of acknowledgment from the reservations clerk when he finally checked into Nedou's Hotel in September 1935.

However, not all forays into the mountains were conducted on such a vast scale. In the 1930s a more modest style of exploration and climbing evolved in the Himalaya, typified by Eric Shipton, HW Tilman and Frank Smythe. Their expeditions in the Garhwal Himalaya were typified by travelling light, without complicated logistics, and often in the company of just a climbing Sherpa or two.

Following Indian Independence in 1947, the nature of trekking the high and remote Himalayan valleys was restructured to accommodate the political changes. For instance, the India/Pakistan partition meant it was no longer possible to trek from Kashmir to Baltistan. To the north, much of India's border with China was restricted. The war in 1962 led to the enforcement of Inner Line restrictions (the restricted areas close to India's sensitive border regions with Pakistan and China) in Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh (at that time part of the Punjab hill states), Uttar Pradesh and Sikkim.

Regions such as Kashmir and the Kullu Valley attracted trekkers and climbers in the 1950s and 1960s. At the time Ladakh was off limits while the Pir Panjal dividing the Kullu Valley and Lahaul was as far as one could trek in Himachal. In Uttarakhand similar restrictions applied and only a few of the classic treks could be undertaken without Inner Line permits.

The gradual lifting of restrictions in 1974 allowed trekkers to visit Ladakh, Zaskar and Lahaul while permits were no longer necessary to trek in many of the northern regions of Uttarakhand. In 1992 the regions of Kinnaur, Spiti and the Johar Valley in Uttarakhand were opened up for trekking. More remote trekking areas close to India's border regions may be possible in the future.